A small group of kids on the west side of Baltimore turned their summer into inspiration for poetry. St. Francis Neighborhood Center’s “Power Project” youth looked around themselves and inside themselves to create haiku. They became the “Poetic Bandits!”

The Dragon House Pizza Parlor

St. Francis Poetic Bandits

A collaboration between St. Francis Neighborhood Center and CityLit Project.
The Dragon House
Pizza Parlor

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Introduction
CityLit Project discovered a new generation of aspiring “Richard Wrights” when Baltimore’s westside youth, poetry, and creativity came together at St. Francis Neighborhood Center in Reservoir Hill. CityLit conducted two sessions in early July, 2009, at St. Francis, a neighborhood center and chapel that was established in 1963 as an outreach center for two local churches. The center contacted CityLit to work with the children who are part of the Power Project, an after-school and summer program that centers on education, mentoring, and the arts. The Power Project is just a small component of St. Francis’s ongoing mission to “give people hope for a better tomorrow by providing them with the tools they need for a better today.” Intern Emily Mullin created and delivered a special program introducing the children to haiku.

St. Francis representative Corrine Warren explained that the Power Project is meant to help students in the Baltimore Public School System that are deemed “at-risk” in both academics and life-skills. “We bring in other organizations and nonprofits to work with the students on developing their life-skills through workshops and presentations,” she said. Mullin decided that the best way to engage children aged 8 to 12 reading at various levels was through haiku because the Japanese form of poetry is simple and fun, yet elegant and refined.
enough that the children could quickly produce meaningful, powerful poetry.

To help the children better connect with the poetry, Mullin’s presentation centered on the eloquent African-American writer Richard Wright. Wright’s book of poetry, Haiku: This Other World, was written in the later years of his life, exposing a new, poetic voice for the writer who is better known for his novel Native Son.

After the two sessions, the St. Francis Power Project kids transformed into the “Poetic Bandits,” as they dubbed themselves, creating poetry and illustrations that came together to create a small PDF book.

We all learned a lot, especially about blue cheese and pizza, sticks and headaches, but also about swimming on hot summer days.

The cover art was also created by St. Francis Power Project kids: Kehtiff drew the fire-breathing dragon, Emonie and lasia both drew pizza slices, lasia drew the rainbow, and Daziya drew the ice cream cone. Kajineea drew the abstract piece on the book’s table of contents and Dionte drew “Donkey Life” at the end of the book.

Congratulations to the “Poetic Bandits!”

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**Haiku**

**Zhanal Bailey -El**
Midtown Academy

“Summer”
Summer is a time
When the kids are out of school
Enjoying the warmth

“Swimming”
Summing is a fun
Sport used to exercise for
Strong bones and wet hair

“Rain”
Rain is a day when
People stay at home and sleep
Rain makes the land damp

**Rodney Richardson**
John Eager Howard Elementary

Football is my sport
I play ball in the summer
I like playing ball
**Malik Green**  
Rognel Heights Elementary School

School is not fun  
And the teachers are not nice  
Home is so much fun

I feel free from school  
So I can get in the pool  
And have fun all day

**Kawon**

Rob took the stick  
And kept asking for it so  
He got the stick back

**Shamar Dixon**

It was very hot  
I thought I would die out there  
But I lived through it

**Leroy Noble**  
Pikeville Middle School

I want to play games  
Like action, horror and quest  
This is fun for me

**Justice Butler**  
John Eager Howard Elementary

We want to go home  
I want to go home and sleep  
This is so boring

**Daziyha Mattocks**  
Dr. King School

I feel good outside  
The fresh air smells like roses  
Today I feel good

Cold, pink ice cream melts  
I like strawberry ice cream  
Afternoon is good

**Jorrel**

A game is cool Mom  
Action games are awesome, too  
Very cool just like you

A headache is bad  
Is a headache that bad mom?  
Why is a headache bad?

**Jamia Bolden**  
John Eager Howard Elementary

It was a hot day  
I saw some grass in the ground  
I saw some bugs

I saw some berries  
They tasted so good and sweet  
I ate all of them
I love Saint Francis
The Power Project is swell
Saint Francis is cool
Tigers are so fierce
Tigers are so mean
Tigers are so cool
Keishawn McKnight
Friendship Academy of Science and Technology
Pizza is so good
I love red sauce and cheese
It makes me full fast
I love juicy steak
It is good with fries and pepsi
I really love grills
Emonie
John Eager Howard Elementary
Pizza is yummy
Rainbows and gold are so great
Rainbows are so cute
Iasia Ross
Powhatan Elementary
Rainbows are so cute
Rainbow snowballs are the best
Pizza is yummy
Robyn-Lynn
John Eager Howard Elementary
I went to the beach
So we went back to the house
To go out to play
Rachelle Jackson
Mt. Royal #66
It was really hot outside
We had a wonderful time
We had a great day
Amber Shaw
Midtown Academy
When I ride my bike
I feel like I am flying high
Purple and black bike
Chilling on the porch
Talking about everything
Chatting with your friends
Board with many wheels
Riding down the street whoohoo
Skateboarding is fun
Diante McKnight
Friendship Academy of Science and Technology
Fried chicken is cool
French fries and chicken are good
Fried chicken is brownish
I love Saint Francis
The Power Project is swell
Saint Francis is cool
Tigers are so fierce
Tigers are so mean
Tigers are so cool
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Iasia Ross
Powhatan Elementary
Rainbows are so cute
Rainbow snowballs are the best
Pizza is yummy
Shamar Dixon
Math Academy

I like Chipotle
And it is very yummy
I love Chipotle

Kehtiff

Green is the good sauce
Meat is the favorite
The spices are hot

Japri

Pizza is so good
Blue cheese is good on pizza
Blue cheese is so good